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SUBJECT: IFTAR DIPLOMACY

¶1. (U) Summary: For the third year, Ambassador and Mrs. Timken led senior Mission Germany staff in hosting Iftar dinners and events, a major element in the Mission's Muslim Engagement activities. This year, the venues were Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, and Munich. Muslim guests uniformly praised the Ambassador for undertaking this outreach and suggested that the Ambassador's example, in part, has encouraged some senior German officials to take similar steps. Iftar dinners have become an important way for Mission Germany to reinforce relationships with key Muslim community leaders as well as set a positive example to German officials and Muslim Germans -- of celebration of common values and respect for cultural differences -- as they work towards integration. End summary.

Ambassador Hosts Iftars

¶2. (U) On September 19, the Ambassador welcomed over 60 representatives of the Muslim communities, as well as other German political and community leaders involved in integration efforts, to his Berlin residence for a program on cultural exchange, including a traditional Iftar reception. Dr. Richard Wilke from the Washington-based Pew Research Center began the evening by presenting recent reports from the Pew Global Attitudes Project on attitudes towards Muslims in the U.S. and Europe. Following his lecture, three Muslim Germans recounted their overwhelmingly positive impressions of the U.S. from their recent exchange programs, including the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP).

¶3. (U) Five nights later, the Ambassador hosted a sit-down Iftar dinner at his residence which allowed for frank and open discussion on issues of concern to Germany's multi-faceted Muslim communities. Muslim guests included Afghanistan's Ambassador to Germany Maliha Zulfacar, federal parliamentarian Hakki Keskin, Berlin parliamentarian Ozcan Mutlu, noted women's rights advocate Seyran Ates, and community activist Badr Mohammed. Also in attendance were Berlin's Integration Commissioner Guenther Piening and the Federal Interior Ministry's Islam Advisor Ali Aslan, himself a Muslim. Echoing the sentiments of the Muslim guests, Mohammed noted that the Ambassador's Iftar invitation was the first that he has ever received in Germany from a non-Muslim organization, including the Turkish government. This point was clearly intended as a signal to German government officials -- specifically, that they should also engage in this type of engagement with the Muslim communities.

If Mohammed Can't Come to the Mountain,...

¶4. (U) The Ambassador also traveled to our consular districts to host large Iftar dinners. On September 25 in

Cologne, the Ambassador and Duesseldorf Consul General Boyse hosted a broad group of 35 leaders from each of the five major Muslim religious organizations (Ayyub Axel Koehler of the Coordinating Council of Muslims and the Central Council of Muslims, Sadi Arslan of DITIB, Ali Kizilkaya of the Islam Council, and Mehmet Yilmaz of the Association of Islamic Cultural Center), women's groups, Kurdish and Alevite organizations, as well as parliamentarians, state and local politicians, activists in interfaith dialogue, and journalists. The Ambassador selected Cologne because of its significance as the unofficial "Capital of German Islam." In Munich, the Ambassador and Consul General Nelson hosted an Iftar dinner for 50 guests, including the Bavarian Minister of Justice and IVLP alumna Dr. Beate Merk and Munich Lord Mayor Christian Ude. Although guests noted that they would be honored by an Ambassadorial invitation even in Berlin, they were particularly impressed by the Ambassador's thoughtfulness in hosting events in their local regions, which precluded the necessity of travel during Ramadan.

15. (U) Both the Cologne and Munich events drew favorable attention in both German and Turkish electronic and print media. For example, the Muenchner Merkur, with a circulation of 230,000, ran an in-depth article on "Muslim-American Understanding on Munich Soil." Prominent media outlet and ARD affiliate B5 radio aired a 3 minute, 40 second report on CG Munich's Iftar activities. Articles on the dinner in Cologne appeared in the Koelner Stadt-Amzeiger/Koelnische Rundschau as well as Turkish-based outlets Huerriyet, Turkeyie, Milliyet, Zaman, and Sabah. Radio Koeln carried a 2 minute interview with the Ambassador.

16. (U) In addition to the Ambassador's events, Frankfurt Consul General Powell hosted an Iftar dinner in Frankfurt on September 25 and attended an Iftar dinner in Wiesbaden with Hesse Minister-President Roland Koch on September 27. Munich

BERLIN 00001841 002 OF 002

CG Nelson joined IVLP alumnus Imam Benjamin Idriz in hosting an Iftar at the latter's mosque on September 25. Mission staff at all levels also accepted invitations to Iftars hosted by Muslim contacts in Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Munich.

German Government to Follow Ambassador's Example

17. (SBU) As in past years, many guests opined that high-ranking German officials such as the Chancellery's Integration Commissioner Maria Boehmer and Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble should host Iftar dinners as well. The Ambassador interjected that Boehmer will indeed host an Iftar this year, while Interior Ministry official Aslan noted that Schaeuble is planning one this October as well. Several guests expressed the opinion that these government-hosted Iftars, brand-new in Germany, are a direct result of the U.S. Mission's extremely active and increasingly visible Muslim engagement activities.

Comment

18. (U) Mission Germany is increasingly using Iftar events as opportunities to engage with a broader spectrum of contacts from NGOs, government agencies, politicians, and others, in addition to religious and secular Muslim contacts. Feedback has thus far been very positive; this is a direction we intend to continue with future years' Iftars.

19. (U) This report includes input from ConGens Duesseldorf, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Munich.
TIMKEN JR